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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Perception of continued existence unperceived

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1 | INTRODUCTION

We believe that the ordinary physical objects that we perceive continue to exist unperceived; and this is intuitively an aspect of any authentic characterization of how the world appears to us in perception.¹ Yet Hume argues that the belief in continued existence unperceived cannot have its source in perception alone (Hume, 1978, I.4.ii). Evans offers a proposal about how to understand the way in which its objects' existence unperceived may indeed be an aspect of our perception that has in one way or another been involved in most of the developed accounts of perceptual objectivity (Evans, 1985). I elaborate these ideas and arguments before considering various ways that Evans's proposal may be implemented. I argue that those currently on offer face serious objections before sketching my own alternative implementation and giving some indication of its virtues. Its key is to allow, in addition to the perceptual evidence grounded in the objects and properties that a person is acquainted with in any particular perceptual experience, also for a kind of formal perceptual evidence grounded in the way in which she is acquainted with such things in any experience.²

2 | THE QUESTION AND HUME'S OBJECTION

My intuitive starting point is the idea that the subjective nature of our perceptual experience intelligibly explains our belief in the continued existence unperceived of its ordinary physical objects. This already comes with baggage. I intend to leave the subjective nature of perceptual experience as open as possible and the idea of intelligible explanation of belief by experience equally as a placeholder to be elaborated by the various explanations that I consider below of this opening intuition.³ The basic idea is that the way things are for us as perceivers somehow explains our

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belief that the objects that we perceive continue to exist beyond our perception of them. The question that shapes the remaining discussion is how exactly we should understand this explanation.

Hume objects that no such explanation could possibly be given (1978, I.4.ii). The argument is contained in the following two sentences.

To begin with the SENSES, 'tis evident these faculties are incapable of giving rise to the notion of the continu'd existence of their objects, after they no longer appear to the senses. For that is a contradiction in terms, and supposes that the senses continue to operate, even after they have ceas'd all manner of operation. (Hume, 1978, p. 188)

In my terms, its form is this.

1. The only way that perception could intelligibly explain our belief in the continued existence of its objects unperceived would be for us to continue to perceive them whilst they are not being perceived.
2. Perceiving something whilst it is not being perceived is a contradiction in terms, and so impossible.
3. Therefore perception cannot intelligibly explain our belief in the continued existence of its objects unperceived.

Premise 1 is based upon the following principle.

(P) The only belief in the existence of its objects that may be intelligibly explained by perception is in their existence whilst being perceived.

The views that I consider below all reject (P), but the reasoning behind it is something like this. The objects of perception are the things that are presented in perceptual experience; and such experience is the simple, unstructured presentation to the mind of those objects. This only constitutes a basis for the intelligible explanation of belief in the existence of specific such objects whilst they are present in experience. That is to say, perceptual experience constitutes such a basis only whilst the objects in question are present in it. Furthermore, their simple, unstructured presentation in experience constitutes a basis for the explanation of belief only in the existence of such objects whilst it they are so presented. That is to say, the existence in which such experience constitutes a basis for the intelligible explanation of belief is only their existence whilst they are being perceived. Hence (P): the only belief in the existence of its objects that may be intelligibly explained by perception is in their existence whilst being perceived.

(P) entails that the only way that perception could intelligibly explain our belief in the continued existence of its objects unperceived would be for us to continue to perceive them whilst they are not being perceived, the first premise of the Hume's argument as set out above. Premise 2 is clearly true; and the argument is valid. So Hume's case that perception cannot be the source of our belief that the ordinary physical objects that we perceive continue to exist unperceived rests entirely on principle (P).

I now turn to a proposal by Evans (1985) as to how the reasoning behind (P), hence Hume's objection to my intuitive starting point, may be blocked.

3 | EVANS'S PROPOSAL

Contrast Hume's scepticism with the following passage from Evans's discussion of Strawson's (1959, ch. 2) exploration of the relation between the objectivity and the spatiality of our thought and experience of the physical world.

Hero [the subject of Strawson's thought experiment charged with making sense of the idea that the objects of his auditory perception may continue to exist unperceived] must be able to understand the hypothesis, even if, in fact, he never believes it to be the case, that the phenomena of which he has experience should occur unperceived. Now, the idea of unperceived existence or rather the idea of existence now perceived, now unperceived, is not an idea that can stand on its own, stand without any surrounding theory. How is it possible that phenomena of the very same kind as those of which he has experience should occur in the absence of any experience? Such phenomena are obviously perceptible; why should they not be perceived? To answer this question, some rudimentary theory, or form of a theory of perception is required. This is the indispensable surrounding for the idea of existence unperceived, and so, of existence perceived. (Evans, 1985, pp. 261–2)

In the terms of my own discussion, Evans's proposal is that, in the presence of this indispensable theoretical surrounding, perception of ordinary physical objects is evidently the joint upshot of their existence and the satisfaction of further independent conditions on their perception that may not always be satisfied, in a way that intelligibly explains our belief that such objects may continue to exist unperceived. (P) is false. For perceptual experience is not a simple, unstructured confrontation with such things. Perceptual experiential presentation is instead structured by a simple theory of perception, according to which what we perceive is the joint upshot of what is there in the world anyway and the satisfaction of further independent enabling conditions on our perception of it that may subsequently fail to obtain.⁴ Thus, my current perceptual experience constitutes a basis for the intelligible explanation of my belief in the continued existence of its objects beyond the extent of that very experience of them. So Hume's objection fails.

The key question about Evans's proposal is how in detail it is to be implemented. How exactly does a simple theory of perception structure perceptual experience of its ordinary physical objects?

4 | INTELLECTUALISM

According to the Intellectualist implementation of Evans's proposal, the subject herself must actively employ a simple theory of perception in thinking about the relation between her perceptual experience and the way things are in the world around her if her perception is to be the intelligible source of her belief that its objects continue to exist unperceived. Evans's writings (1982, 1985) suggest that this is his own view.⁵ In what follows I argue that the viability of Intellectualism depends to some extent upon the relation proposed between the subjective nature of her perceptual experience, on the one hand, and her employment of a simple theory of perception, on the other.⁶

Thus, according to Additive Intellectualism, perceivers who do and those who do not actively employ a simple theory of perception, in otherwise identical circumstances, share perceptual

experience with an identical subjective nature. This is a common factor between their otherwise quite different mental lives. Nevertheless, in line with the general project of Intellectualism, it is the employment of a simple theory of perception by those who do so that explains how their perceptual experience is an intelligible source of their belief that its objects continue to exist unperceived.

According to Transformative Intellectualism, on the other hand, certain subjects' active employment of a simple theory of perception transforms the subjective nature of their perceptual experience. They and subjects who do not employ a simple theory of perception both have perceptual experience, but this has a quite different nature in each case. Again, in line with the Intellectualist implementation of Evans's proposal, it is the employment of a simple theory of perception in this way by those who do so that explains how their perceptual experience is an intelligible source of their belief that its objects continue to exist unperceived.⁷

Additive Intellectualism fails to explain how the subjective nature of perceptual experience itself intelligibly explains belief in the continued existence unperceived of its ordinary physical objects as required. For the Additive conjunct of Additive Intellectualism entails that the subject's active employment of a simple theory of perception is not necessary for her perceptual experience to have the subjective nature that it has. Yet its Intellectualist conjunct entails that her employment of a simple theory of perception is necessary for the intelligible explanation of her belief in the continued existence unperceived of the objects that she perceives by the subjective nature of her perceptual experience. Hence Additive Intellectualism entails that the subjective nature of her perceptual experience is not sufficient to provide an intelligible explanation of her belief in the continued existence unperceived of its objects.

How does Transformative Intellectualism fare? Its contention is that a perceiver's active employment of a simple theory of perception transforms the subjective nature of her perceptual experience in such a way that this provides an intelligible explanation of her belief in the continued existence unperceived of its ordinary physical objects. This also strikes me as unsuccessful, but in a way that serves to clarify what is required by such an explanation as I understand it. The aim is to elaborate the role of perceptual experience as the intelligible source of her belief in the continued existence unperceived of its objects. Yet her active employment of a simple theory of perception already presupposes that very belief. For the core of her simple theory of perception is the idea that what she perceives at any given time is the joint upshot of what is there to be perceived anyway, whether or not she is perceiving it, and her being where she is and meeting the other enabling conditions on her perception of it. This explicitly embeds her commitment to its continued existence unperceived. So little, if anything, remains of the intuitive idea of perception as the intelligible source of her belief. Although it has further problems of its own, Additive Intellectualism is also subject to this same objection. For it shares the idea that the active employment of a simple theory of perception presupposing belief in the continued existence unperceived of what she perceives is essential to the explanation of this belief by the experience to which it is added.

It may be replied that the objection depends upon an overly demanding interpretation of the requirement that perceptual experience should be the source of a person's belief in the continued existence unperceived of its objects. The official requirement is just that this belief should be intelligibly explained by the subjective nature of her perceptual experience. The Transformative Intellectualist at least offers an account of how this requirement is supposed to be met by appeal to the transformative structuring of her perceptual experience by the perceiver's active employment of a simple theory of perception. It is a consequence of the account that her experience fails to make acquisition of the belief in continued existence unperceived intelligible in a subject

who does not already have it. For its explanation presupposes that very belief. But why should we accept the further requirement that experience be an intelligible source of the belief in this sense? Perhaps we should instead adapt the Wittgensteinian slogan that “Light dawns gradually over the whole” (Wittgenstein, Anscombe, von Wright, & Paul, 1969, § 141). The status of a person’s perceptual experience as an intelligible explanation of her belief in the continued existence unperceived of its objects comes together with her active employment of a simple theory of perception in thinking about the relation between her perceptual experience and the way things are in the world around her, which in turn effectively deploys that very belief about continued existence unperceived. None of these elements is available independently of or prior to the others. Rather, they hold each other in place as parts of a single package that the subject acquires as a whole.

My response to this reply from the Transformative Intellectualist is explicitly to endorse the more demanding requirement as a constraint on any adequate account of the idea that the subjective nature of our perceptual experience intelligibly explains our belief in the continued existence unperceived of its ordinary physical objects. My understanding of the Humean challenge is to provide an explanation of how it is that creatures with perceptual experience like ours, who also have the concepts necessary to grasp the belief that its objects continue to exist unperceived, but do not yet have that belief, may intelligibly acquire it on the basis of that very experience. Of course, there is an artificiality in setting things up this way. First, it is no doubt unrealistic to suppose that perceivers with experience like ours and all the concepts necessary to grasp the belief that its objects continue to exist unperceived remain in a state of limbo, as it were, before they actually acquire the belief in question. Second, it may well be that some at least of the concepts necessary to grasp the belief that the objects of perception continue to exist unperceived are normally acquired in the process of acquiring that very belief. Nevertheless, my proposed interpretation of Hume’s challenge is supposed to clarify the conceptual and logical commitments I take to govern the project. Transformative Intellectualism fails this challenge.

Intellectualism, both Additive and Transformative, should therefore be rejected.

5 | ENACTIVISM

According to the Enactivist implementation of Evans’s proposal, the crucial contribution of a simple theory of perception to the intelligible explanation by a person’s perceptual experience of her belief in the continued existence unperceived of its objects consists in its systematic role in the modulation of her behaviour in response to sensory input.⁸ The simple theory codifies the way in which sensory input jointly depends upon the way things are in the world around the perceiver and her changing position and orientation in relation to them. Her natural behavioural responses display a systematic sensitivity to this dependence. In this way, a simple theory of perception is at work in the perceptuomotor system. Initial examples of this in action would be the ways in which we “spontaneously crane our necks, peer, squint, reach for our glasses, or draw near to get a better look [at something before us]” (Noë, 2004, pp. 1–2), or peer round a door frame to keep an eye on someone passing along a corridor going out of view. The account has two key components: (a) perceptual sensation systematically depends upon the subject’s changing position and orientation in relation to what is there in the world around her; (b) perceptual experience whose subjective nature intelligibly explains her belief in the continued existence unperceived of its worldly objects consists in her practical knowledge, or skilful deployment,⁹ of such dependence.

Note here the crucial use of two distinct perceptual terms. The target phenomenon to be elucidated is perceptual experience whose subjective nature intelligibly explains perceivers' belief in the continued existence of its objects unperceived. Enactivism is characterized by the claim that possession of such experience consists in practical knowledge, or skilful deployment, of the dependence of perceptual sensation upon what is there in the world and the subject's changing position and orientation in relation to it. Thus, perceptual sensation is the basic notion that the Enactivist uses in explanatory elucidation of the source of our belief in the continued existence unperceived of the ordinary objects that we perceive in our perceptual experience of them.

Enactivism plausibly avoids my objections to Intellectualism. First, it avoids the insufficiency objection to Additive Intellectualism, because the proposed practical role of a simple theory of perception in modulating the transition from sensation to behaviour is transformative of her perceptual experience rather than additive to it. Second, it avoids the circularity objection to Transformative Intellectualism, because this practical role is plausibly not dependent upon the perceiver's explicit grasp of a simple theory of perception already embedding belief in the continued existence unperceived of the objects that she perceives.

Still, I claim that Enactivism fails as an account of how the subjective nature of a person's perceptual experience intelligibly explains her belief in the continued existence unperceived of its ordinary physical objects. Its contention is that such experience is constituted by her practical knowledge, or skilful deployment, of the systematic dependence of perceptual sensation upon what is there in the world anyway and her own position, orientation, and movement in relation to it. The question I would like to press in evaluating it is what exactly perceptual sensation is supposed to be as it plays this fundamental role in the proposed account.

I assume that this is not to be identified with the perceptual experience itself that is the primary target of our investigation. Perceptual sensation is supposed to be something strictly more basic than this, a perceiver's practical knowledge, or skilful deployment, of whose systematic dependence upon her changing position and orientation in relation to the objects in the world around her constitutes her possession of such perceptual experience that thereby intelligibly explains her belief in the continued existence unperceived of its worldly objects.

Is this more basic perceptual sensation itself supposed to be or involve conscious experience of some kind on the part of the perceiving subject or it is instead the Enactivists' term for a kind of physical stimulation of her perceptual system that does not itself involve any kind of consciousness. So far as I can see, both possibilities are available in principle. I argue in what follows that neither is satisfactory.

Noë takes the former option. He suggests that the nature of what I call perceptual sensation, which is laid bare in a subject without practical knowledge, or skilful deployment, of its systematic dependence on her changing position and orientation in relation to the objects in the world around her producing it that constitutes full blown perceptual experience, is a kind of consciousness in which such objects are only degradedly present and not easily or immediately recognized: 'experiential blindness', as he calls it (2004, esp. pp. 3–10). He explicitly insists that is not an absence of consciousness. He also identifies perceptual sensation in spatial perception with the 'perspectival appearances' of ordinary physical objects: the appearance of their shape from the particular point of view in question, for example, by which he means, I take it, consciousness of "the shape of the patch needed to occlude the object on a plane perpendicular to the line of sight" (p. 83).

Assume first, then, that perceptual sensation involves a specific modification of the perceiver's consciousness, and that it is supposed to be her practical knowledge, or skilful deployment, of the way in which this depends upon her changing position and orientation in relation to the

things around her that constitutes her possession of perceptual experience intelligibly explaining her belief in the continued existence unperceived of its ordinary objects. On this assumption Enactivism surely fails by its own lights. The position is proposed as an elucidation of how conscious perceptual experience itself is the intelligible source of a perceiver's belief in its objects' continued existence unperceived. Yet the most basic form of perceptual consciousness, namely perceptual sensation here, is explicitly acknowledged to do no such thing. Perceptual experience strictly dependent upon this perceptual sensation is supposed to be such a source. But this is characterized as a form of practical knowledge or skilful activity explicitly downstream of the mode of perceptual consciousness constituted by the initial perceptual sensation, akin to a subsequent interpretation of that sensation. Primary perceptual consciousness itself, that is to say perceptual sensation, is absolutely not an intelligible source of the perceiver's belief in the continued existence unperceived of its ordinary physical objects.

It may be replied that the subject's most basic perceptual consciousness is on this view transformed into a form of perceptual experience that does intelligibly explain her belief in continued existence unperceived in the sense required precisely by the subject's practical knowledge, or skilful deployment, of the dependence of perceptual sensation upon her changing position and orientation in relation to its objects. But I repeat my initial question: what exactly is the perceptual sensation supposed to be here, practical knowledge or skilful deployment of whose systematic dependence on her changing position and orientation constitutes her possession of such perceptual experience? It cannot be that experience itself, for the explanatory structure of Enactivism, requires that it is strictly more basic than this; and it cannot be a more basic form of perceptual consciousness for the reasons just given. So it can only be some kind of position-and-orientation-dependent physical stimulation of her perceptual system not itself involving any kind of consciousness: the second option that I distinguished above.

Now it is certainly true that worldly objects impact physically upon a perceiver in just this way, and also that she normally shows in her engagement with the things around her a sophisticated practical knowledge and skilful deployment of the ways in which such physical stimulation depends on her changing position and orientation in relation to them. But as yet this story says absolutely nothing about her conscious perceptual experience of the world. So if this form of Enactivism is offered as an account of the intuitive datum that the subjective nature of her perceptual experience intelligibly explains her belief in the continued existence unperceived of its objects, then it depends upon a highly questionable behaviourist reduction of conscious perceptual experience. The proposal would be that possession of such experience simply consists in being disposed to behave, or actually behaving, in ways that display a suitable sensitivity to the systematic dependence of the physical stimulation of her perceptual systems upon her changing position and orientation in relation to the physical objects around her.

I do not regard such a behaviourist reduction as credible; and it is explicitly rejected on Noë's Enactivism. His idea is that perception depends on the possession and skilful exercise of practical knowledge in the presence of conscious perceptual sensation: "This is not a behaviourist thesis" (Noë, 2004, p. 33).¹⁰ I assume other Enactivists agree. So I find the current version of the view also unacceptable.

I conclude that there is no defensible form of Enactivism that offers any hope of an adequate elucidation of the way that perceptual experience intelligibly explains our belief in the continued existence unperceived of its ordinary physical objects.

6 | SUBPERSONALISM

According to the Subpersonalist implementation of Evans's proposal, the subjective nature of a person's perceptual experience intelligibly explains her belief in the continued existence unperceived of its ordinary physical objects in virtue of the role of a simple theory of perception in the subpersonal processing that computes its determinate personal level representational contents from proximal sensory stimulation otherwise underdetermining its worldly causes.¹¹ The key idea is that such processing delivers perceptual contents that reliably represent perceptual constancies in objects and their properties over appropriate local spatiotemporal variation in the proximal sensory stimulation that they produce, by mirroring in the principles implicit in its transitions the ecologically most likely regularities by which the actual environmental causes lead to the patterns of stimulation in question. That is to say, we have the capacity in perception "systematically to represent a given particular or attribute as the same despite significant differences in proximal stimulation—despite a wide variety of perspectives on the particular or attribute" (Burge, 2010, p, 274).

A simple example serves to illustrate the idea (see Nudds (2012)). Light arriving at the eyes from various parts of the scene before a perceiver varies in its intensity on arrival. This variation underdetermines certain worldly features of the scene. For it is the joint effect of both variation in the intensity of the light incident upon the surfaces out there and variation in the proportion of the light incident upon them that is reflected by those surfaces. Thus, to simplify the picture even further, a reduction in the intensity of the light arriving at the eyes from two adjacent parts of the scene, p1 and p2, may be the result of two different scenarios. First, less light is falling on p2 than on p1, because, although both are parts of a uniformly coloured surface, p2 is in shadow and p1 is not: something else is obstructing some of light falling on p2 in a way that it does not obstruct light falling on p1. Second, p1 and p2 are uniformly illuminated parts of distinct surfaces meeting between p1 and p2 in the scene before the perceiver, p2 reflecting less of the light incident upon it than p1 does, because the two surfaces are of different colours, p1 lighter than p2.

The perceptual system resolves the proximal underdetermination between these two scenarios by exploiting a general fact about the world that we perceive. Shadows on a surface tend to produce a gradual reduction in the intensity of light falling upon it. Adjacent surfaces of different colours, on the other hand, tend to produce a sudden reduction in the intensity of the light reflected, from the lighter to the darker surface. Things could in principle have been quite different; and occasionally they are different. So the actual reduction in the intensity of the light arriving at the eyes from p1 and p2 underdetermines the distal scene. But the correlations between gradual intensity reductions and shadows, on the one hand, and between sudden intensity reductions and surface edges, on the other, are reliable. The visual system exploits these in computing perceptual contents from the sensory stimulation produced by the scene before the perceiver, determinately representing a uniformly coloured surface partly in shadow or an edge where two differently coloured surfaces meet, depending on whether the reduction in the intensity of light detected is gradual or sudden respectively.

Even this simple example becomes quite complicated in any actual case, with multiple shadows and edges all interacting with each other. And similar processes are nested and multiplied in the full transition from proximal sensory stimulation to complete perceptual content. But the basic idea that the visual system exploits contingent lawlike features of the actual environment in resolving the underdetermination of worldly causes by sensory stimulation should nevertheless be clear. In this way perceptual contents are derived that reliably represent objects and their

properties, at a time and over time, as the same or different, despite significant differences or similarities in the proximal stimulation that they produce. The core contention of Subpersonalism in response to Hume's challenge is that this accounts for the way in which the subjective nature of our perceptual experience intelligibly explains our belief in the continued existence unperceived of its ordinary physical objects. The sophistication of the subpersonal processing producing it is what endows our experience itself with this explanatory power.

My basic objection to Subpersonalism is that its perceptual contents representing identities or constancies between various objects and their properties across different perspectives upon them are simply served up from nowhere so far as the subject herself is concerned, as the contents of her experience, in such a way that they fail to make fully intelligible from her own point of view the continued existence unperceived of what she thereby perceives. I'll approach this objection in three ways.

First, the contents representing perceptual constancies produced by the subpersonal computation central to the view may for all that has been said so far be wholly unconscious. So Subpersonalism makes no direct contact with the problem that I am concerned with here of how the subjective nature of our perceptual intelligibly explains our belief in the continued existence unperceived of its objects. Of course, a connection may be made by restricting attention to cases in which the perceptual contents in question are indeed conscious. Still, the point remains that the account on offer of how such conscious experience explains belief in the continued existence unperceived of its objects makes no essential reference to its being conscious. This is all well and good so far as Burge himself is concerned, who apparently takes it to be a virtue of his position (2010, esp. pt. III). But it is inconsistent with a conviction powerfully elaborated by Eilan (2011, 2017) that the intelligible explanation of our belief in the continued existence unperceived of the objects that we perceive is based upon the specific modification of consciousness that our perceptual experience is. That is to say, the explanation depends essentially upon the consciousness of our experience in a way that Subpersonalism fails to capture.

I share Eilan's conviction; but this formulation of the objection depends entirely on its defence against Burge's alternative vision. I cannot take this on here. So I turn to a second concern.

Subpersonalism explains our belief in the continued existence unperceived of what we perceive on the basis of perceptual contents explicitly identifying certain objects and their properties across our various experiential perspectives upon them. Regardless of their consciousness, are such contents up to the task? Not obviously so, if what is involved is simply the representation of sameness of object or property over variation in perspective within continuous perception. There is no obviously intelligible explanation of a person's belief in an object's continued existence unperceived from her perceptual representation of it as uniformly coloured despite apparently differing in darkness over its spatial extent, or as one and the same thing despite apparently differing in certain respects over the temporal extent of her experience of it, say. These representations of identities over variation in perspective during continuous perception may provide the basis for the subject's inference to their best explanation by the idea that the objects in question also continue to exist unperceived. But this is not an account of the initial datum as I understand it, that the continued existence unperceived of the objects that we perceive is an aspect of the way that things strike us in perception itself.¹²

Perhaps the representations of identity central to Subpersonalism are up to the task if the subpersonal computations involved additionally exploit intuitive mechanical principles in producing contents identifying an object as one and the same over breaks in its perception, due, for example to temporary occlusion by an obstacle. This is entirely in keeping with the position (Burge,

2010, ch. 10); and simply taken at face value, such representations plausibly directly explain the perceiver's belief in such objects' continued existence unperceived.

This immediately raises my third, concern, though. On the current version of Subpersonalism, perceptual contents are served up to consciousness by subpersonal perceptual processing as if from nowhere, without any intelligibility as to why the perceiver should take them at face value or what grounds their identities and constancies. Any belief in the continued existence unperceived of the objects perceived to which such identity contents give rise is therefore not fully intelligibly explained by the subjective nature of perceptual experience, characterised as it is simply by a blank 'assertion' of the relevant identities without any illumination as to their grounds or insight as to how they might be true.

The definitive feature of Subpersonalism is that the simple theory of perception that is crucial to the computation of the constancy contents of conscious perceptual experience operates entirely subpersonally and beyond the ken of the subject herself. In a sense that comes to the fore in section 7 below, its workings do not show up in the form of her conscious perspective on the world, which receives only the final judgement of the subpersonal system, as it were, as to how things are out there, as its representational content. So, even if this perceptual content suggests that the things that she perceives may continue to exist unperceived, the subjective nature of her perceptual experience itself gives her no understanding of how or why this is so.

There is plainly room to dispute whether such additional illumination is necessary for the intelligible explanation of our belief in the continued existence unperceived of the ordinary physical objects that we perceive by the subjective nature of our perceptual experience of them. Here, as with the my consideration of the Wittgensteinian response to the circularity objection to Transformative Intellectualism earlier, I rest content with offering this objection to Subpersonalism as an explicit registration of my own commitment to giving an account of the source of this belief in our perceptual experience of the world around us that does satisfy this more demanding condition on its intelligible explanation, rather than as any refutation of Subpersonalism tout court.

7 | PERCEPTUALISM

This brings me finally to the implementation of Evans's proposal that I am inclined to endorse myself and wish to offer here for further consideration. According to Perceptualism, the role of a simple theory of perception in structuring perceptual experience intelligible explanatory of belief in the continued existence unperceived of its objects consists in its essential role in a correct metaphysics for that experience.

On the view of its metaphysics that I endorse (2011, 2018a, 2018b, 2019a, 2019b), perceptual experience is a temporally extended point of view on what is there in the world in the relevant circumstances of perception. That is to say, S's perceptual experience at a time *t* is her conscious acquaintance, from her position and orientation at *t* and in the particular perceptual circumstances, with the worldly scene before her. This is not a causal explanation of her experience, but rather specifies the metaphysical nature of her conscious perceptual condition at that time.¹³ Thus, a simple theory of perception with enabling conditions on perception that are independent of what is there in the world anyway and may subsequently fail to be met is essential to the metaphysics of conscious perceptual experience itself.

Perceptualism is the view that this is what provides the intelligible explanation by the subjective character of perceptual experience of our belief in the continued existence of its objects unperceived. I propose it for consideration here. Of course, there is a great deal of work required

fully to elaborate and defend Perceptualism. I end by giving some clarification of the view and sketching some of what I take to be its virtues.

7.1 |

Perceptualism depends upon the significance of the metaphysics of conscious perceptual experience for which beliefs may intelligibly be explained by its subjective character. This same idea shows up in the reasoning that I offered for principle (P) above that carries the weight of Hume's objection to my intuitive starting point that the subjective nature of our perceptual experience intelligibly explains our belief in the continued existence unperceived of its ordinary physical objects. According to Hume's metaphysics, the conscious presentation of certain objects in perception consists in their simple, unstructured presence before the mind. This is what motivates the key claim that such presentation constitutes a basis for the intelligible explanation of belief only in the existence of such objects whilst it they are so presented.

From the perspective of Perceptualism, Hume's impoverished metaphysics of perceptual experience counterintuitively restricts what may be intelligibly explained by its subjective character. The correct response is to highlight the place of Evans's proposal about the centrality of a simple theory of perception in correcting the metaphysics of perception in such a way as to provide the intelligible explanation of our belief in the existence unperceived of its objects that Hume fails to find. This is precisely what Perceptualism achieves.¹⁴

It is crucial in understanding the position to recognize that the place of simple theory of perception, according to which perception is a matter of what is there in the world anyway given the satisfaction of spatial and other enabling conditions that may subsequently fail to obtain, lies in the metaphysics of the conscious conditions that are perceptual experiences. The theory is in this sense not the perceiver's theory. It is the definitive claim of Perceptualism that its essential role in a correct account of the nature of perceptual experience nevertheless shows up for the perceiver in intelligibly explaining from her point of view as the subject of that conscious condition the continued existence unperceived of its ordinary physical objects.

7.2 |

Perceptualism places great weight on the thesis that perceptual experience is acquaintance with particular worldly things from a point of view and in certain circumstances. In considering such experience we are often concerned with which worldly things are presented in this way; and reasonably so. This intelligibly explains many of the beliefs to which it gives rise, that those particular objects are shaped and coloured thus, for example. That the experience is from such and such a point of view and orientation in specific perceptual circumstances is equally part of its fundamental nature, though, regardless of what the objects of acquaintance may be on any specific occasion from that point of view and in those circumstances. Hence the existence of perspectival and other circumstantial enabling conditions on such perceptual experience, which actually obtain but may subsequently fail to do so, is essential to the nature of perceptual consciousness itself. What it is like for the subject in perceiving the world as she does therefore has a form that intelligibly explains her belief in the continued existence unperceived of the particular worldly objects with which it acquaints her in this way.

7.3 |

Perceptualism recognizes that more is required for the intelligible explanation of her belief than the fact that the objects of perception do indeed continue to exist unperceived. This must somehow be evident in her conscious experience of them. Its distinctive contention is that the way in which such experience makes this evident to the subject is quite different from the way in which it makes evident to her the shapes and colours, for example, of the particular objects that she perceives. The latter is a matter of which shapes and colours she is acquainted with in her experience. The former—that is to say, the continued existence unperceived of those objects themselves whose shapes and colours these are—is a matter of the way in which she is acquainted with those things. This is equally a component of the metaphysics of that very conscious experiential condition.

7.4 |

Thus, the Perceptualist claims that the continued existence unperceived of the objects of perception is intelligible to the subject in a way that I argued the Subpersonalist fails to capture. For the correct account of how it is that the objects she perceives may continue to exist unperceived is essential to the conscious condition that she is in in perceiving them. Her experience is not simply a brute representation of various identities across changing perspectives thrown up into consciousness by the subpersonal perceptual processing system that therefore remain in a crucial sense unintelligible to the perceiver.

I acknowledged in concluding the discussion of Subpersonalism above that the accusation of a failure of intelligibility against that view is best understood as an indication of what I expect from an adequate account of the intuitive idea that the subjective nature of our perceptual experience intelligibly explains our belief in the continued existence unperceived of its ordinary physical objects. In keeping with this understanding, the claim here that Perceptualism succeeds in capturing the necessary intelligibility is likewise best understood as a clarification of what I take this to involve: further elucidation of the very notion of intelligible explanation that figures in this intuitive starting point.

7.5 |

Perceptualism may be seen as virtuously intermediate between Intellectualism and the *de facto* truth of a simple theory of perception, according to which what we perceive is the joint upshot of what is there in the world anyway and the satisfaction of further spatial and other independent enabling conditions on our perception of it that may subsequently fail to obtain. I argued that the former fails to vindicate the idea of perception as the source in the required sense of our belief in the continued existence unperceived of the objects that we perceive. The latter is clearly insufficient for perception to constitute such a source in a way that is in any sense intelligible to us as perceivers. Accordingly, Perceptualism insists that a simple theory of perception is essential to the intrinsic characterization of perceptual consciousness yet without being employed by the subject in explicit reflection about the relation between perceptual experience and the way things are in the world around her. Enactivism and Subpersonalism plausibly both aim to occupy this same middle ground, finding Intellectualism overly cognitively demanding and the *de facto* truth of a

simple theory of perception insufficiently so for the intelligible explanation of belief in continued existence unperceived. I argue above that both fail. I offer Perceptualism as a better attempt.

7.6 |

Finally, I return to the issue that initially prompted Evans's proposal about the importance of structuring perception with a simple theory of perception: the relation between objectivity and spatiality. Perceptualism clearly gives spatiality a central role in the intelligible explanation of our belief in the continued existence unperceived of the objects that we perceive. For the idea that a person is acquainted with the objects in the world around her from a particular point of view is crucial to the metaphysics of the conscious perceptual experience that provides this explanation.

Contrast this with a quite different appeal to spatiality. On this alternative, perception represents its objects, initially quite neutrally with respect to their continued existence unperceived, as located in space; and the subject arrives at her belief in their continued existence unperceived as the best explanation of their spatial and other behaviour over time. Call this *Inferentialism*. Here, the source of the belief is her reasoning on the basis of patterns in perceptual experience that is in its intrinsic nature neutral on the continued existence of its objects unperceived. According to Perceptualism, on the other hand, the source of her belief in the continued existence unperceived of the objects that she perceives lies in the subjective nature of her perceptual experience itself in virtue of the constitutive role of a spatial simple theory of perception in the metaphysics of that very experience.

I claim no absolute necessity for this fundamental connection between spatiality and the objectivity of continued existence unperceived. For there may be perceptual experience equally explanatory of belief in the continued existence unperceived of its objects in virtue of the constitutive role in its metaphysics of a simple theory of perception with wholly non-spatial enabling conditions.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the crucial place of spatial considerations in the intelligible explanation of this belief on the basis of our perception is intrinsic to the subjective nature of the experience itself according to Perceptualism in a way that it is not on the current Inferentialist alternative. My contention is that only Perceptualism adequately accounts for the intuitive idea that the subjective nature of our perceptual experience itself intelligibly explains our belief in the continued existence unperceived of its ordinary physical objects. Inferentialism fails by the lights of the understanding of this intuition controlling the discussion here.

8 | CONCLUSION

We believe that the ordinary physical objects that we perceive continue to exist unperceived; and this is intuitively an aspect of any authentic characterization of how the world appears to us in perception. That is to say, the subjective nature of our perceptual experience intelligibly explains our belief in the continued existence unperceived of its ordinary physical objects. Evans's proposal concerning the role of a simple theory of perception in structuring our perceptual relation with what we perceive in the world around us is the key to countering Hume's scepticism about this intuitive starting point. Intellectualism, Enactivism, Subpersonalism, and indeed Inferentialism, all seek to implement Evans's proposal in this context. I have offered reasons for doubting their success and for preferring my own Perceptualism, according to which a simple theory of perception plays a constitutive role in the metaphysics of our perceptual experience itself. In this

way, Perceptualism insists, in addition to the perceptual evidence grounded in the objects and properties that a person is acquainted with in any particular experience, also upon a kind of formal perceptual evidence grounded in the way in which she is acquainted with such things in any experience.¹⁶

NOTES

- ¹ I elaborate this intuitive starting point more fully in section 2 below.
- ² Much of the argument here is developed in greater detail and extent in my forthcoming book, *The Objectivity of Perception* (Brewer, forthcoming).
- ³ The intuition has also been rejected (Mackie, 2019). I discuss this scepticism elsewhere (Brewer, forthcoming). I assume here that such scepticism is misplaced: our belief in the continued existence of the ordinary objects that we perceive beyond our own current experience of them is indeed intelligibly explained by the nature of our perceptual experience of them.
- ⁴ As with the intelligible explanation of belief by experience, precisely what is involved in the structuring of perceptual presentation by a simple theory of perception in this way is the subject of debate and dispute between the various accounts that I consider below.
- ⁵ I also read Strawson (1959, 1966), McDowell (1994), and Boyle (2012, 2016) as Intellectualists.
- ⁶ The key distinction here draws directly upon Boyle's distinction between additive and transformative conceptions of rationality (2016).
- ⁷ The Transformative Intellectualist faces delicate questions about how current and stable a perceiver's active employment of a simple theory must be to maintain the subjective character of her perceptual experience that intelligibly explains her belief in the continued existence unperceived of its objects. But I leave these aside here.
- ⁸ Noë (2004) is the primary focus of my discussion of Enactivism. See also Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991), Hurley (1998), Thompson and Varela (2001), O'Regan and Noë (2001a).
- ⁹ I set aside the important issue of where to locate what is required here on a continuum between some form of practical knowledge in the absence of even the capacity for its active realization, on the one hand, and its deployment in current behaviour, on the other. This varies between, and even within, the views of different proponents of Enactivism.
- ¹⁰ See Block (2001), and O'Regan and Noë (2001b) for further debate over Enactivists' commitment to some form of behaviourism.
- ¹¹ I focus here on the most developed version of this view from Burge (2010).
- ¹² See sect. 7.6 below for a little more on the need and means to avoid this inferential picture of our belief in the continued existence unperceived of what we perceive in the current context.
- ¹³ I do not seek here further to defend this metaphysics of perceptual experience. It is explicitly a disjunctivist, relationalist form naïve realism. As well as references to my own work in the text, see Soteriou (2016) for excellent discussion and bibliography. My focus instead is on its implications for the intelligible explanation of our belief in the continued existence unperceived of the ordinary physical objects that we perceive.
- ¹⁴ See Strawson (1974) for a different but somewhat analogous response to Hume.
- ¹⁵ See again the debate between Strawson (1959, 1980) and Evans (1985) for more on this issue.
- ¹⁶ I am grateful to Dom Alford-Duguid, David Bain, Matt Boyle, Jessica Brown, Maria Corrado, Tom Crowther, Imogen Dickie, Naomi Eilan, Craig French, Richard Fumerton, Andrea Giananti, Anil Gomes, Hemdat Lerman, Heather Logue, Guy Longworth, Matt McGrath, Martine Nida-Rümelin, Louise Richardson, Johannes Roessler, Umrao Sethi, Paul Snowdon, Gianfranco Soldati, and Matt Soteriou for helpful comments on earlier versions of this material.

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